

INTEGRATING WOMEN'S HEALTH CENTERS: VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION AND THE DHHS OFFICE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

The National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health (CoEs) were established in 1996 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health. Their mandate is to establish and evaluate a new model health care system that unites women's health research, medical training, clinical care, public health education, community outreach, and the promotion of women in academic medicine. Their goal is to improve the health status of diverse women across the life span.

This brochure highlights some of the CoEs' collaboration with the Veteran's Administration and women's health programs.

CLINICAL SERVICES

◆ Boston University CoE

The affiliated Veterans Administration Boston Healthcare System's Women Veterans Health Program (WVHP) continues to expand and address the needs of veteran women. The practice provides primary care, mental health services, and specialty services that are tailored to the specific needs of women veterans. Two programs that have been successfully targeting homeless women veterans include the Homeless Program and the Transitional Living Facility.

Boston Women Veterans Health Program

The Medical Director of the WVHP also serves as Evaluation Director of the BU CoE. In 2001, the WVHP of the VA Boston Healthcare System was designated a Clinical Program of Excellence.

The Women Veterans Health Program continues to serve as a major clinical, teaching, and research resource for the VA Boston Healthcare System. Comprehensive care is provided on-site in the Women Veterans Health Center by primary care clinicians (MDs and CNP), nursing, psychology specialists, a breast surgeon, gynecologists, urologist, rheumatologist, sexual trauma care specialists, and psychiatrist. The medical center relies on this spectrum of services to provide comprehensive care for women veterans.

Patients in the WVHP tend to have complex interactions between their physical and mental health. The interdisciplinary team approach is ideal for the management of such high-risk patients. The co-location of Women Veterans Health Center, the Women's Stress Disorders Treatment Team (one of 4 in the country), and the Women's Health Sciences Division of the National Center for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at the Jamaica Plain Site of the VA Boston Healthcare System, has allowed the BU CoE to develop a unique model of care, which integrates medical and mental health services.

Currently, the WHSD is spearheading two unique WVHP initiatives targeting homeless women veterans:

- The *Homeless Program* provides outreach and social services to homeless and potentially homeless women veterans. This program has brought new patients (as many as 5 per week), to the WVHP. Many of these women previously had no source of health care.

- The *Transitional Living Facility* is the first residence of its kind in the country. This program provides a supportive, therapeutic residence to women who suffer from homelessness, domestic violence, or substance abuse. In addition to receiving supportive medical and social services, the clients benefit from a work program.

The WVHP plays an important role in providing clinical experiences for trainees and in supplying the medical center with teaching staff with expertise in women's health for morning report and other teaching conferences. This has changed the tenor of the training programs at the VA. WVHP staff provides education not only for trainees but also for permanent staff via the Women's Health Lecture Series, which is presented at both the JP and Brockton campuses. In addition, the WVHP is the focal point of the Women's Health Fellowship program, which trains future leaders in women's health. The fellows make important contributions to the medical center in terms of clinical work, teaching activities, and women's health research.

The multidisciplinary team approach to patient care represents a best practice model by pulling together primary care clinicians, psychologists, social workers, and medical sub-specialists to care for patients. Since patients tend to have complex interactions between their physical and mental health, the interdisciplinary team approach is ideal for the management of high-risk patients. Twice monthly team meetings allow face-to-face communication among team members. Regular team meetings foster communication and team building. Patients receive coordinated, comprehensive care and staff is able to gain support from colleagues.

Despite the growing numbers and proportions of American veterans who are women, women veterans still make up a small minority of the patients seeking care. Because of this past history, and their numerical minority status, a need to provide

services to women veterans in a single women-only site was recognized. Therefore, the Women Veteran's Health Center is developed on a "one-stop-shopping" model, where women come to one site, and all care providers and services meet their needs in that center. Primary care, specialties, and ancillary services provide care to women veterans in this single location, separate from where they provide the same care to male veterans. It is the unique nature of their health problems, and overall low proportion of women veterans seeking care, which makes this delivery system necessary and important to patients. This practice has recently received the coveted Clinical Program of Excellence Award within the Veterans Health Administration.

◆ **University of California, San Francisco CoE**

The San Francisco VA Medical Center is one of the 3 main campuses of the University of California San Francisco. The VA was funded in 1994 as one of the 8 Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers to develop a Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center. The San Francisco VA Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center is staffed by general internists, gynecologists, a psychiatrist, social worker, and nurse practitioners with expertise in women's health. The Center Director of the UCSF Mt. Zion Women's Health Clinical Research Center, a major component of the UCSF Center of Excellence in Women's Health, developed the San Francisco VA Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center and directed it for 6 years. The current Director of the Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center and two of the primary care providers are members of the UCSF Center of Excellence Clinical Research Center staff. Outpatient care and gynecologic surgery for patients at the Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center are provided by members of the UCSF CoE in Women's Health.

◆ **University of Illinois at Chicago CoE**

The women's clinic at The Veterans Affairs Chicago Health Care System (VACHCS) VA West Side Medical Center serves women veterans in the greater Chicago metropolitan area. The staff includes a director and internist, an internal medicine nurse practitioner, a psychiatrist, a gynecologist, and a social worker. The clinic staff has access to other therapists and social workers through the VACHCS. A physician, who is also on the staff of the Center for Women's Health of the CoE, provides gynecologic services one to two days each week. These services include colposcopies, STD screening, annual exams, surgical consultations, and treatment of various gynecologic conditions.

◆ **Indiana University CoE**

The Indiana University CoE faculty and residents see patients, both outpatients and inpatients, at the Indianapolis VA Hospital. One of the CoE faculty in Obstetrics/Gynecology sees patients on a regular basis at the VA Hospital. Patients can be referred to the CoE clinic from the VA.

◆ **University of Michigan CoE**

The University of Michigan CoE (through OBGYN and IM physicians) staff operate a women's clinic at the VA Ann Arbor Hospital; both general care and gynecologic surgery is performed at the clinic. Additionally, CoE faculty teach seminars and inservices to both Internal Medicine and surgery residents at the VA, focusing on women's health clinical activities and lectures. The CoE is always interested in doing more, and have several researchers at the UM School of Nursing who specialize in veteran women's health issues.

◆ Tulane and Xavier Universities of Louisiana CoE

The Veteran's Administration Medical Center at New Orleans continues to operate a successful women's clinic, entitled the VA Women's Pavilion. For approximately 1,500 women, this clinic offers a number of services including Primary Care, Gynecology, Women's General Urology, and a Surgical Oncology/Breast Clinic. The space includes an education/multimedia room for patient and staff education, two procedure rooms, four exam rooms and an attending room. To support the program, a Primary Care Team is in place including nurse practitioner support. This provides increased access to health services for women veteran patients. The Tulane/Xavier CoE (TUXCOE) has continued its collaboration with VA representatives to identify opportunities to work together on women's health issues in the area. One of the Total Woman Health Care Center (TWHCC) doctors also works in the VA Women's Pavilion, supervising internal medicine residents. Also, the Women's Pavilion Nurse Practitioner continues to be an active member of the TUXCOE Clinical Advisory Committee.

◆ University of Washington CoE

The University of Washington Academic Medical Center (UWAMC) is closely affiliated with the Veteran's Administration of Puget Sound Health Care System. The Seattle VA Medical Center Women's Clinic serves as a primary care site for veteran women. Women receive reproductive services and benefit from a variety of specialized support programs designed to address specific needs; for example, mental health services with emphasis on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse.

◆ University of Wisconsin, Madison CoE

The Madison VA houses the Women Veterans Clinic, which is one of the University of Wisconsin CoE satellite clinics. The

CoE Center Director is the program director of the entire VA Women Veterans Program. In addition, the CoE Co-Director is the staff gynecologist for this program. The Women's Health Fellowship Program, which is funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs, is also directed by the CoE Director. The VA Women's Health Clinic meets three ½ days weekly. One clinic is a full interdisciplinary clinic. The women's health fellow, a staff psychiatrist, a sexual trauma counselor, a social worker, a nurse practitioner, a pharmacist and pharmacy resident, medical residents, and occasionally an Ob/Gyn resident all see patients in this clinic.

The *Women Veterans Stress Disorders Treatment Team* is a collaborative effort between the Women Veterans Program and the VA Psychiatry Service. A team of psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers see patients from six VA hospitals who suffer from post traumatic stress disorders. This may include military sexual trauma and combat-related psychological trauma. Many women have complex, interacting, and synergistic psychiatric and medical conditions such as fibromyalgia, irritable bowel, chronic pain syndromes, depression, and anxiety.

LEADERSHIP

◆ University of Washington CoE

The UWMC Women's Health Alliance groups and the Seattle Veterans Administration Medical Center Women's Health Alliance Groups have continued to meet regularly since their formation over the past four years. These groups bring in speakers to discuss issues relevant to women faculty. The informal Women's Leadership Book Club has also met regularly, expanding its scope through rotation of meetings across the different sites. These meetings have continued to be an

opportunity for networking socially between senior and junior women faculty, as well as fellows and students. Multiple mentoring relationships have continued to develop from these meetings.

The UW SoM Women in Academic Medicine Committee has supported efforts to develop hospital-based women's groups for support and networking. The concept originated with the Harborview Women's Alliance in 1995; this group brought together HMC women faculty from different disciplines, to informally discuss issues of mutual interest. This hugely successful endeavor was replicated last year at two other major teaching hospitals within the system: the UWMC and the Seattle Veterans Administration Medical Center. Meetings are open to all Health Sciences faculty, residents, fellows and students.

◆ University of Wisconsin CoE

The Women Veterans Program is represented on the CoE Advisory Committee as is the County Veterans Service Office. The Women Veterans Coordinator at the Madison VA Hospital hosts a conference in Madison annually for the Women Veterans Coordinators in the hospitals in the Veteran Integrated Service Network and the CoE collaborates in this activity.

OUTREACH

◆ Magee-Womens Hospital CoE

Under the direction of the Women's Veterans Coordinator, Magee Women's Hospital CoE has developed a very large outreach program specifically designed to identify both homeless and perhaps more importantly "risk of soon to be homeless" women.

Director of the CoE clinic at the Pittsburgh VA, and two faculty members have been working on a study of women's satisfaction and achievement of primary care goals within the VA. In addition their domestic violence research includes patients from both the CoE settings and the VA.

◆ University of Puerto Rico CoE

The San Juan VA Medical Center is adjacent to the Rio Piedras Medical Center where the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus (the CoE clinic is also located on the Medical Sciences Campus). The University of Puerto Rico and the VA have had a long and continuous history of cooperation. Many of members of the CoE faculty see patients or have worked in research there, many of the CoE residency programs collaborate with them, and the UPR School of Medicine Obstetrics & Gynecology Department has many joint projects with them. The VA has supported the PR CoE ever since it applied to become a CoE in 1998. The San Juan VAMC Chief of Staff expressed VA's interested in collaborating with the CoE and in improving services to veteran women, including preventive care, patient and family education, and health care. The CoE Clinical Director has participated in many women's health activities with the VA. She serves as their consultant for gynecological surgery patients and sees their domestic violence cases. An Internal Medicine VA affiliated physician, VAMC, is a provider at the CoE clinic. A VA/CoE affiliated psychologist gives orientation on sexology to UPR Ob-Gyn Residents.

◆ Tulane and Xavier Universities CoE

The Louisiana (LA) VA system is closely linked with Tulane and the CoE faculty, residents etc. who see patients there on a regular basis. The CoE continues to work with the LA VA system in the continued development of their comprehensive women's health program. The LA VA opened their Women's

Health Pavilion in June 2001. The CoE has one provider who works both in the VA Women's Pavilion and the CoE Clinical Center (the Total Woman Health Care Center), further maximizing program benefits.

◆ University of Wisconsin CoE

The CoE, Women Veterans Program, and State Veterans Office collaborate on an annual conference for women veterans. This conference includes women's health topics, a panel of women veterans discussing their experiences in the military, and a national speaker of importance to women veterans. Last year, for example, the UW CoE had General Wilma Vaught present. She spearheaded the development of the Women Veterans Monument in Washington, D.C. The year before, the UW CoE had General Sharon Van Zyle, the first woman general in the National Guard. Between 70 and 85 women veterans attend this conference.

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION/TRAINING

◆ Boston University CoE

The Veterans Administration Boston Healthcare System Veterans Administration serves as a training site for Boston University Medical School and Harvard Medical School medical residents. The CoE Center Director and the Medical Director of the WVHP have developed a continuity clinic and curriculum in response to the needs of medicine residents assigned to continuity clinics at the VA (whose clinics are almost exclusively made up of male veterans). This is offered in addition to block rotations in Women's Health. The Women's Health Fellow collaborated on the development of the curriculum.

◆ University of California, San Francisco CoE

The San Francisco VA Medical Center is one of the 3 main campuses of the University of California, San Francisco. The VA was funded in 1994 as one of the 8 Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers to develop a Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center. The UCSF CoE provides training in women's health care for UCSF VA Prime Medicine Residents and for UCSF Categorical Medicine Residents Staff of the UCSF CoE also work with staff at the Women Veterans Comprehensive Health Center to conduct a simulated patient teaching program for issues in women's health, and a week-long mini-residency for providers from other VA Medical Centers. The San Francisco VA Medical Center was also awarded a Women Veteran's Health Clinical Research Fellowship by the Department of Veterans Affairs in 1995. This 2-year training program provides didactic courses and close mentoring for physicians interested in conducting clinical research in issues in women's health. Thus far, the Fellowship has enrolled 7 fellows and graduated 6, all of whom currently hold academic appointments and are pursuing research in a variety of issues in women's health. The Director of the UCSF Mt. Zion Women's Health Clinical Research Center continues to direct the Women Veteran's Health Clinical Research Fellowship.

◆ MCP Hahnemann, doing business as Drexel University College of Medicine CoE

The CoE has had outreach to the Coatesville VA in assisting their efforts for women and minority veterans. The Women's Health Education Program Director, presented a plenary session on cultural issues for minority women veterans and led several workshop sessions for VA clinicians to discuss the role of Women's Health especially as it pertains to neurologic and psychiatric needs of women veterans.

◆ University of Michigan CoE

An exciting development that resulted from the work of the CoE curriculum committee is enhanced educational and training opportunities for residents interested in veteran women's health or OBGYN physicians in the role of primary care physicians. A rotation at the Women's Health Program of the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Ann Arbor, MI was offered for the second time this year. In this placement, residents are given increasing responsibility for patient care and for the education of others on the health care team in the Veterans Administration environment.

◆ University of Washington CoE

The UW Administration Medical Center (AMC) consists of the UW School of Medicine, the UW Physicians Neighborhood Clinics (UWPN), the UW Physicians (UWP) and Children's Medical Group (CMG) faculty practice, and two hospitals: UW Medical Center (UWMC) and Harborview Medical Center (HMC). The Seattle Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) is a major component of the UW SoM training programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. UW AMC also retains offices, staff and clinical faculty to oversee established residency program training sites at the Providence Medical Center (PMC), Swedish Medical Center (SMC), Pacific Medical Center (PMC), Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center (FHCRC), and the VAMC in Boise, Idaho. Within the Greater Seattle area, UW medical students also rotate through training sites at the Group Health Cooperative (GHC) Medical Center, Virginia Mason Medical Center (VMC) and Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma.

The University of Washington CoE/School of Nursing & VA has a special educational partnership that provides financial assistance to VA nurses to complete their BSN's, an important

initiative given the national nursing shortage. In addition, the Seattle VA Women's Clinic Director has worked with the CoE in developing educational materials for their medicine residents. They also have close links with the Regional Director of the Women's Programs – who used to work in the CoE clinic—her position oversees both the VA women's program and the Madigan Army Hospital for Women and Children.

◆ University of Wisconsin CoE

The Women's Health Fellowship Program is funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs and is an integral part of the CoE. The goal of this program, directed by the CoE Center Director, is to train academic leaders in women's health. Fellows select a research mentor and begin a project. Most also take graduate courses toward an advanced degree. The fellowship is two years long with an option for a third research year. These fellows attend core training activities with the postdoctoral fellows supported by an National Institutes on Aging Women's Health and Aging Training Grant.

RESEARCH

◆ Boston University CoE

The Medical Director of the Veterans Administration (VA) Boston Healthcare System's Women Veterans Health Program, which is a designated VA Clinical Program of Excellence, is also the Evaluation Director for the Boston University CoE. Most recently she has begun work on a qualitative comparison of women's health centers in the VA and the CoEs. She also led the Boston University CoE in the collaborative Qualitative Evaluation of the National Centers of Excellence in Women's Health.

The Women's Health Sciences Division of the National Center for PTSD of the VA Boston Healthcare System is part of the Women Veterans Health Program and affiliated with the BU CoE. This Division includes nationally recognized leaders in the field of PTSD research and treatment. Their landmark studies of women veterans have informed the development of the BU CoE clinical programs. The Women's Stress Disorders Treatment Team focuses on research and treatment of PTSD, other focuses include homeless women veterans, and gender awareness among VA staff.

◆ Magee-Womens Hospital CoE

The CoE Evaluation Director has received funding to 1) compare data on the organization, staffing, practice setting and service availability at the OWH CoE Clinical Care Centers and the Veteran's Administration Specialized Women's Health Centers, and 2) qualitatively analyze the issues affecting the sustainability of the comprehensive and integrated models for women's health care delivery within the VA and within CoE academic health centers. The Magee-Womens Hospital CoE and the Boston University CoE are collaborating with the Veteran's Administration. This project will provide critical information to policy makers and clinical administrators about exemplary models for women's health care delivery and changes in these models over time.

NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

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**NATIONAL CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WOMEN'S
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